

The Evergreen State College  
Evergreen Student Experience Survey 2006  
Responses of Olympia Campus Students

### Diversity at Evergreen

Students were asked a series of questions regarding the importance of diversity to their learning, the amount of respect for diversity, and interactions with people on campus who are different from themselves in terms of backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles. In terms of the importance of diversity on campus to learning, the most common response among Olympia campus respondents was that diversity was "Very" important with nearly as many indicating "Quite a Bit." A total of 18.4% of Olympia respondents indicated that diversity was "Somewhat" important to their learning and 9.4% indicated that it was "Not at All" or "A Little Bit" important.

On the question, "How much respect do you think there is for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus?" the most common response was "Quite a Bit." The mean was lower on this item than on the question relating to the importance of diversity to learning. A total of 13.4% of the Olympia campus respondents indicated that there was no or very little respect for differences. Another 31.8% thought that there was some respect for differences, while 54.8% indicated there was "Quite a bit" to "A Lot" of respect on campus.

*How important do you think diversity on campus is to your learning? (N=375, 11 skipped question)*

Not at all (0)	A Little Bit (1)	Somewhat (2)	Quite a bit (3)	Very (4)
3.5%	5.9%	18.4%	35.2%	37.1%

Mean = 2.97

Median = 3.00

*How much respect do you think there is for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus? (N=374, 12 skipped question)*

None (0)	Very Little (1)	Some (2)	Quite a bit (3)	A Lot (4)
1.6%	11.8%	31.8%	35.3%	19.5%

Mean = 2.59

Median = 3.00

*How do you feel about your interactions with people at Evergreen who have different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles than your own?*

A total of 329 Olympia campus respondents wrote a response to this question. Responses were categorized to protect confidentiality and to identify patterns among responses. Some students had multiple comments that fit within different categories. See the table on the next page that shows the number of comments within each category.

Type of Comment	Number of Respondents with Type of Comment	Percent with type of comment
Interactions described as "Great," "Good," or "Wonderful" with no qualifications	77	23.4%
Interactions described as "Great," "Good," or "Wonderful" but with qualifications	23	7.0%
Interactions described as "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," or "Comfortable" with no qualifications	38	11.6%
Interactions described as "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," or "Comfortable" but with qualifications	11	3.3%
Interactions are enriching learning experiences	61	18.5%
Not enough diversity at Evergreen/more diversity needed	40	12.2%
Don't have this type of interaction often with people different from self/doesn't occur generally	29	8.8%
Not on campus much or do not interact with others/keep to oneself	9	2.7%
Lack of intermingling among students	2	0.6%
Respondents described themselves as open or respectful	25	7.6%
People are open and accepting on campus	21	6.4%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other political views	24	7.3%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of people based on gender identity, sexual orientation, or beliefs about human rights and sexual orientation	8	2.4%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other races, ethnicities, cultures	7	2.1%
People are judgmental and biased against others based on socioeconomic background/class	6	1.8%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other religions/religious beliefs	6	1.8%
People are judgmental and biased against others generally/for other reasons	14	4.3%
Recalled negative experiences in seminar/classroom interactions	18	5.5%
Recalled positive experiences in seminar/differences are good for class	7	2.1%
Everyone's different/don't pay attention to differences	10	3.0%
Made suggestions for activities, training or other institutional action	8	2.4%
Mixed experiences	8	2.4%
Comments on survey question	8	2.4%
Issues are not discussed openly, assumptions are made	7	2.1%
Comments related to Evening and Weekend Studies	6	1.8%
Age as a factor in interactions on campus	5	1.5%
Other/not able to categorize	14	4.3%
N/A or Prefer not to Respond	2	0.6%

### **Interactions are "Great," "Good," or "Wonderful" with or without qualifications**

The largest category of responses were those where respondents described interactions as "Great," "Good," or "Wonderful," with no qualifications. A total of 23.4% of the respondents had comments that fit in this category. There were another 7.0% that used these adjectives, but who had qualifications about their experiences. These qualifications or exceptions were coded into other categories -- many of them related to the infrequency or lack of interactions of this type.

### **Interactions are "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," or "Comfortable" with or without qualifications**

Thirty-eight respondents (11.6% of Olympia campus respondents) used adjectives that were somewhat positive, such as "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," or "Comfortable," and who did not add any qualifications to these statements. An additional 3.3% of the respondents used this kind of language in response to the question, but added qualifications to their response.

### **Interactions are enriching learning experiences**

A relatively large proportion (18.5%) of the Olympia campus students described interactions with people at Evergreen who are different from themselves as enriching learning experiences. One respondent wrote: "The diversity at Evergreen [en]ables me to keep an open mind to new ways of thinking and living." Another respondent wrote: "Great! It is a fantastic experience that enhances my educational goals."

### **Not enough diversity at Evergreen/more diversity needed**

Forty respondents (12.2%) had comments related to the need for more diversity on campus. The types of diversity called for ranged from ethnic and racial diversity to socioeconomic diversity to diversity in terms of political beliefs and perspectives.

### **Lack of interaction with people different from themselves**

Twenty-nine respondents (8.8%) commented on a lack of interaction with people who were different from themselves. Many of these respondents attributed the lack of interaction with people who were different to a lack of diversity at Evergreen. Nine respondents (2.7%) wrote about limited interactions with anyone on campus and a variety of reasons were given. A couple respondents wrote generally that they keep to themselves. One respondent wrote that because of their program they do not have much spare time for interaction with people. Other respondents said that they were either hardly ever on campus, were taking just one four-credit course, were on contract, or preferred not to interact with other Evergreen students for other reasons. Two respondents noted a lack of intermingling among students and divisions between them in terms of socioeconomics, ethnicity, and nationality.

### **Open-mindedness among respondents and at Evergreen**

Some respondents (7.6%) commented on their own open-mindedness toward diversity. Some of these respondents described being open to new experiences, being respectful and accepting of others, or building new relationships and practicing nonviolent communication. Other respondents (6.4%) described people at Evergreen as open-minded, tolerant, or otherwise accepting of differences.

### **Judgment and bias, racism, and other forms of oppression**

There were respondents who described experiences with people at Evergreen being judgmental or not accepting of some types of differences. There were 24 respondents (7.3%) who conveyed that there was a lack of open-mindedness or bias against people with different political perspectives or opinions on campus. Most of these comments related to others being intolerant, people ignoring or silencing others who have conservative or mainstream viewpoints, bias against people who are in the military or who have differing opinions. One respondent reported feeling less tolerant of some political opinions since attending Evergreen.

In some cases the same respondents and in other cases different respondents described other types of judgment or prejudice. Eight respondents (2.4%) commented on people being biased, judgmental or not open to others based on sexual orientation or gender identity, or that most students were heterosexual and closed-minded in their perspectives. Seven respondents (2.1%) described experiences of intolerance or judgments based on one's race, ethnicity, or culture. Three respondents described racism or hesitancy toward interacting with students of color, and four respondents felt that there were racist attitudes or intolerance toward white people. Six respondents (1.8%) described discrimination and judgment based on socioeconomic background or class. Six respondents (1.8%) commented on intolerance on campus toward people with religious or spiritual beliefs. Several respondents mentioned bias against Christians.

There were 14 additional comments about people being judgmental or not accepting for other reasons (such as ageism or ableism) or in general.

#### **Negative and positive interactions in seminar**

Eighteen respondents (5.5%) described negative situations in seminar. Some respondents felt that faculty could better structure seminars or deal more directly with issues of racism and other types of judgment and discrimination. Some described seminars as "hostile environments" where some students are silenced and others are put on the spot to represent an entire race or ethnicity, gender identity, nationality, or other group. Others described lack of diversity in seminar, saying that many students have perspectives that are too similar to spur meaningful discussion. Some respondents felt that white males tended to dominate seminar discussions, while others felt that some students who were labeled white, male and/or Christian were silenced or ignored by other students in seminar. Other respondents described people as being guarded or uncomfortable when some topics were discussed.

There were seven respondents (2.1%) who connected diversity in backgrounds, lifestyles, and perspectives with positive experiences and learning opportunities in seminar. Some of these respondents specifically mentioned geographic and age diversity and different perspectives and opinions as enriching seminars.

#### **Ignore differences, everyone is different**

There were ten respondents (3.0%) who said that they do not pay attention to differences and that they generally treat all people the same way. Some people said that all people have different backgrounds, lifestyles, and perspectives, while others acknowledged that there are differences and said that they do not treat people differently based on those differences. One student wrote: "People are people and when people themselves are the only issue, things go better than they could've if you make a big deal about race/gender differences."

#### **Suggestions for Institutional Action**

There were eight respondents who had suggestions for action or areas for improvement for Evergreen. One respondent wrote that, "...people want to appreciate and welcome differences, but they come to Evergreen with many ingrained beliefs and stereotypes. Evergreen doesn't do enough to 'shake up' beliefs and stereotypes." Another respondent questioned whether Evergreen had come very far in terms of diversity if it was asking students about interactions with others, and questioned the commitment of the college administration to responding to negative comments in response to this question.

Other suggestions included mandatory diversity seminars, mandatory anti-hate workshops for first-year students, and more diversity education and social activities. One respondent wrote, "I think the Putting [fill in the marginalized/target group] at the center of education lecture series should be a constant in Evergreen's offerings. And, I hate to say it, but I think annual attendance should be mandatory for all students!" There were also comments calling on more support for students and staff of color and with disabilities. Finally, another respondent emphasized that there is a lot of talk about diversity, but very little done to directly address injustices.

### **Mixed experiences**

Eight respondents (2.4%) emphasized that their experiences were mixed. Some of these comments emphasized that interactions depend on the attitude of individuals. Others described more or less conducive environments, with some seminars being successful and others described as "hostile environments." One respondent described disturbances in housing, while at the same time describing most social and academic interactions as enjoyable. One respondent wrote: "I feel like it can be difficult at first to bridge such gaps in social settings but the academic learning environment is very conducive to teamwork and therefore acts as a very productive place for interaction."

### **Comments on survey question**

There were eight respondents (2.4%) who commented on the survey question itself. Of the seven, six were critical of the question or thought it was "weird." One respondent wrote that everyone has different backgrounds and perspectives so the question seemed strange. Another respondent thought that the question was poorly phrased. One respondent wrote: "I get along great with people of different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles. The question is, do these students get along with me because I'm a person of color?" Another suggested that the question should be whether students "feel comfortable with a system that creates divisions based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation." Another comment was whether the question mattered. Another respondent wrote, "This question is posed quite well," and expressed gratefulness that the question was asked with respect to lifestyle and background instead of in the context of race or ethnicity alone.

### **Issues are not discussed openly**

Seven respondents had comments that related to inability to openly discuss issues. There were comments that some students felt reluctant to share their opinions, are silenced, or are ignored by other students and faculty. One respondent described feeling that (s)he could never speak his/her mind about other races because s(he) is white. Another respondent reported feeling that some people are "given permission to overstate their personal perspective based on race, while others are completely overshadowed..." Another respondent wrote that there is little priority given to engaging students in discussion about diversity.

### **Evening and Weekend Studies**

Some students discussed Evening and Weekend Studies. Some respondents commented that they felt detached, isolated, or that their experiences were limited because they are in Evening and Weekend Studies. Other respondents wrote that they had more experiences with diversity in terms of differences in lifestyles, perspectives, backgrounds and age because they are taking Evening and Weekend Studies offerings. Others felt that the work experiences of students in Evening and Weekend Studies and their commitment to take classes enhanced learning experiences in the classroom.

### Age as a factor in interactions on campus

There were five respondents who mentioned age as a factor in interactions on campus. Two respondents wrote that they are older students and that younger students are generally polite, but that some younger students have difficulty relating to them or are "clueless." Two additional respondents wrote that they would like to meet more students who are older. Another respondent wrote that older students contributed much to classroom discussions.

### Other comments

There were other comments that went uncategorized, either because there weren't similar comments among Olympia campus respondents, or because they pertained to a different topic. One respondent wrote: "Most people are middle-class, white and liberal, but there is still a great deal of variation between people who fit that profile, and every aspect of diversity is enriching. Diversity should not be considered only in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation and economic status"

A respondent commented, "Students often have very high expectations of Evergreen, leading them to disappointment when the institution does not meet them. They are often more interested in challenging the institution than themselves."

Another student wrote: "Great, but I don't care much for the whole 'different learning styles' madness. I understand people have weaknesses, but dyslexia is a disfunction. a person that can not read, simply can not read. Others at this campus believe that they have 'different' styles of reading and learning."

After writing a long comment on bias and judgment against certain political opinions, a respondent wrote that the Cooper Point Journal is "the biggest waste of paper." Another wrote: "On advice of council, I refuse to answer on the grounds that any answer I give will incriminate myself."

One respondent wrote that people on campus "seem somewhat cold." Yet another respondent wrote: "I feel pressured not to be anything but calm and nonchalant." Another wrote that the social climate is different than "up North." Another wrote, "Many are offensive and antagonistic, others are silent and avoidant. I want them to feel SAFE." One respondent noted a general lack of interest among freshmen. Another wrote, "Feel like they eat 'the other' hippie cultural appropriators."

Another comment was: "It seems that there is enough if any diversity at evergreen." Another respondent commented, "homogenized conversational topics are boring."

One respondent wrote of the strengths of the Tribal: Reservation-based/Community-determined programs and how each location "...presented unique as well as common issues."